

DEWBERRY (*Rubus flagellaris*)

FLOWERS: April - June

DESCRIPTION: As blackberry except stems trail or sprawl, tips root. Rose Family.

HABITAT: Rocky open woods, thickets, prairies, roadsides, railroads

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: June - August

USES: Same as blackberry



The main difference between the dewberry and blackberry is the stem. Dewberries have a trailing or sprawling stem whose tips take root. The blackberry stem is erect, often arching, but the ends do not root. Some people seem to think the dewberry is larger and juicier than the blackberry. I won't dispute this. The fruits are used in exactly the same way as the blackberry which makes it a food from the heavens!

BLACK CHERRY (*Prunus serotina*)

FLOWERS: April - May

DESCRIPTION: Leaves with rounded teeth, fruit in grape-like bunches, dark when ripe. Rose Family.

HABITAT: Woods, along streams

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: July - August

USES: Jelly, syrup, liqueur



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CAUTION: See pages 219 and 220

The wild black cherry, or rum cherry, obtained the name because of its color and the fact that the juice was an excellent additive to rum in making a cherry drink. To make a cherry liqueur, four parts of cherries to one part water is simmered for 15 minutes. Strain the mixture and for every cup of liquid, add equal amounts of sugar, bring to a boil, pour into sterilized jars and seal for future use. One part of juice may then be added to two parts of rum, whiskey or brandy

Another method used in making a liqueur is a recipe called cherry bounce. A friend of mine makes this with any wild fruit and the results are superb! Fill a bottle half full of cherries, add raw or melted sugar and fill with whiskey. About 1 or 1½ cups of sugar seems to be the right touch of sweetness for us. This mixture

should be allowed to set for at least two months and a year of aging is much better. Strain in a plastic strainer, rather than a metal one, to avoid discoloration and serve after your next dinner!

These cherries also make a delicious dark red jelly. Cover the cherries with water and simmer for 10 minutes or more. Strain off the juice and measure it. For each cup of liquid add $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups of sugar and a package of pectin per every four cups. A trick when making jelly is to measure the liquid and add pectin before returning to the stove. Just as the liquid begins to boil, add the sugar and stir almost continuously until the mixture thickens and the last couple of drops off the spoon slither together and drop like thin jelly. Allow the mixture to cool slightly, spoon off the scum created by the pectin and your jelly is ready to bottle and seal or cover with paraffin.

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An excellent syrup can be made from wild cherries. I have even used a batch of "already used for jelly making" cherries for my syrup. Cook the cherries as directed for jelly. When you have poured off the juice for jelly, place fresh water over the same cherries and boil gently for 15 minutes. This second water makes a syrup that is a pleasant surprise for pancakes. To make syrup, add equal amounts of sugar and a dab of butter to your juice, return to the stove and boil for just long enough to notice a thickening of the liquid. Serve hot over pancakes and bottle the extra syrup for another day's treat.

The cherries, which hang down much like a cluster of wild grapes, turn from white or greenish to red before reaching the dark purple or blackish color when ripe. They are about the size of a pea and rather sour to eat raw. They are not difficult to pick and the results are certainly worth the effort.



KENTUCKY COFFEETREE

(*Gymnocladus dioica*)

FLOWERS: May - June

DESCRIPTION: Leaves alternate, doubly compound, 8-12 leaflets. Leaflets egg-shaped, entire, sharp tip, dark green above and below. Pea Family.



HABITAT: Low or rich woods, base of bluffs, along streams

LOCATION: Scattered

COLLECTION: Winter - Spring

USES: Coffee, nut

The pod of the Kentucky coffeetree is a large, attractive case housing 6 to 9 oval brown seeds. The shell around the seed is hard, making them difficult to crack open. The first time I obtained some of the pods, I pried the pod open, took out the seed and attempted to bite it, almost ruining a tooth. Realizing that there was a shell around the seed, I got a hammer and proceeded to the cement steps for pounding. The slightly rounded seed squirted out from under the hammer as though it had been greased! Retrieving it from across the driveway and noticing that the bean was still intact, I attempted to hammer at it again with an instant replay of the above proceedings. Next I took careful aim and held onto the bean. It took several HARD whacks to finally break it open. The raw bean somewhat resembles the taste of raw peanuts.

I did know that was certainly a lot of work, so I set out to find an easier way to get the bean out of its shell. I tried soaking in water, freezing and roasting. Bonanza! Roasting at 350 degrees was the answer. The shells pop open slightly and can then be opened easily with a nut cracker. The roasted beans are a reasonably good nut, especially when salted or soaked in salted water solution and rebaked.

When coffee is the goal, bake an additional two hours at 200 degrees. This should produce a dark brown bean that, when ground, makes a decent cup of caffeine-free coffee. My biggest problem was not to let the grounds become too fine as it clogged up the coffeepot strainer and produced nothing but a mess.

32 The tree holds onto the pods, dropping them in early spring. Prior to that time, you need to be part squirrel to climb out on the limb or have access to a cherry picker!





BLACK LOCUST (*Robinia pseudo-acacia*)

FLOWERS: May - June

DESCRIPTION: Medium tree, compound leaf with 7-19 alternate leaflets. Spines on branches at base of leaf stalk. Pea Family.

HABITAT: Dry or rocky upland woods, along streams, pastures, thickets, waste lands

LOCATION: Statewide, probably every county

COLLECTION: May - June, flowers; Fall - pods

USES: Fritter, tea, vegetable

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CAUTION: See page 218

The black locust is a tree to use with caution. Many parts of the tree are poisonous, including the seeds and bark, but the flowers are reputed to be edible.

The blossoms make a dandy fritter for breakfasts, luncheons or with dinner. Prepare a medium thick pancake batter and dip the flower cluster into it. Fry this in hot fat until golden. Absorb as much of the grease as possible on a paper towel, squeeze with either lemon or orange juice and roll in powdered or granulated sugar.

A tea is made by pouring boiling water over the flowers and allowing it to steep. It wasn't because the taste was bad that my intake was a small dose, but rather the fact that one authority questioned the poisonous qualities of such a tea. I'm still here!

NEW JERSEY TEA (*Ceanothus americanus*)

FLOWERS: May - November

DESCRIPTION: Low shrub, oval and alternate leaves, dark green above, pale below with three ribs. Flowers on long stalk, airy pom-poms. Buckthorn Family

HABITAT: Upland rocky prairies, glades, open woods, thickets, railroads

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: Summer

USES: Tea



New Jersey tea has played an interesting role in our American history. It was one of the unsung heroes of the Boston Tea Party. This protest move by the colonists over a tax on imported teas resulted in a boycott of those teas and local substitutes were found. One of these was the New Jersey tea.

The freshly picked leaves make a fair tea. To brew a cup of fresh New Jersey tea, pick 4 - 5 leaves and wash thoroughly. Pour one cup of boiling water over them and allow them to steep for 3-5 minutes. Most tea drinkers prefer to gather the leaves while the plant is still in bloom and allow them to dry.

Leaves may be dried in a variety of ways. Lay them out on a cookie sheet and leave on an unused kitchen counter (are there such creatures?). Or, place the leaves in a bag and tie up near the ceiling for a few months. They may be placed on newspapers and stored in the attic. After a long, thorough drying period, put the leaves into a jar to store until needed. As I'm writing this I'm drinking a cup of New Jersey tea I gathered last summer after a float trip on the North Fork River. To make the tea with dried leaves, put a healthy teaspoon of crushed leaves in a tea strainer and pour one cup of boiling water over it, allowing this to steep for the 3 - 5 minutes recommended by most tea sources. It has an amber color and is not at all unpleasant when aided by honey or sugar. I can, however, understand the pioneers' desire for an occasional cup of the imported stuff!!

AMERICAN BASSWOOD

(*Tilia americana*)

FLOWERS: May - July

DESCRIPTION: Lopsided, heart-shaped leaves. Alternate. Dark green above, light green below. Flowers dangle from a stalk which has narrow, leaflike wing. Linden Family.



HABITAT: River and stream banks, rich woods, slopes

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: May - July

USES: Tea, chocolate substitute, vegetable

The flowers of basswood have such a sweet fragrance it's no wonder the tea is so flavorful. There is a large basswood in the corner of the school playground where I teach, so my supply is large. The flowers may be used fresh or dried for tea.

Indians were supposed to have eaten the buds in spring, both as a thirst quencher and cooked as a vegetable.

The fruits grind up to make a chocolate substitute. The problem is in preserving it. Make only enough for your present needs, as the chocolate won't keep.

HONEWORT (*Cryptotaenia canadensis*)

FLOWERS: May - August

DESCRIPTIONS: Tall stem, leaves 3-parted, toothed. Tiny white flowers. Seed pods about 1/3 inch long. Parsley Family.

HABITAT: Rich, rocky woods, ravines, low ground in wood valley, streams.

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: March - June

USES: Potherb, salad



The early leaves and stems are a fine addition to your wild salad. The stems may also be cooked as an asparagus-like vegetable by boiling for 4 - 5 minutes in salted water and dousing with butter.

It is reputed to have an edible root. Although I have not tried the root as yet, several sources indicate that when boiled the root is eaten with oil (perhaps butter?).



QUEEN ANNE'S LACE

(*Daucus carota*)

FLOWERS: May - October

DESCRIPTION: Lacy flat flower clusters. Leaves finely cut, fern-like. Hairy stems. 3 bracts, forked, below flower-head. Parsley Family.

HABITAT: Fields, waste grounds, roadsides, railroads, thickets

LOCATION: Statewide

COLLECTION: March - June, leaves; November - March, roots

USES: Vegetable, seeds, salad

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CAUTION: See page 223

This lacy flower with fern-like foliage is the mother of our present carrot. It is suggested in some books that the plant may be poisonous; other readings point out the similarity of wild carrots and the poisonous water hemlock. In checking the two plants, I've a clue for identification. Wild carrot has many small hairs on the stem, while the stems of the water hemlock are smooth and hairless.

The roots dug in spring are fair; later in the summer they become woody and inedible, although they give a hint of flavor to a stew. Just remember to dip out the carrot root before serving.

The seeds have a strong carrot taste and may be dried, stored in a spice jar, and used as a caraway seed replacement on rolls and breads, or as a seasoning in your favorite soup or stew. To dry the seeds, clip off the flowering umbels after they have dried on the stalk and already formed the "bird nest" shape which gives the plant one of its common names. Allow the seeds to continue drying inside and then rub out the seeds.

The young leaves may be added to a tossed salad or used in vegetable soups.

Another interesting meal is Wild Carrot Fritters. Dip the flowerheads in a thin pancake batter and fry until golden.

**DEER BERRY, SQUAW
HUCKLEBERRY** (*Vac-
cinium vacillans*)

FLOWERS: April - May

DESCRIPTION: Branching
shrub, small oval, alter-
nate leaves. Small bell-
shaped flowers, dangle
downwards. Heath
Family.

HABITAT: Acid soils of
sandstone, chert, open
rocky woods, ridges,
glades

LOCATION: Central and
southern Missouri

COLLECTION: June - August

USES: Jelly, fruit



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The deerberry is so called because the white-tail deer enjoy the twigs and buds of this shrub. Another name is Squaw Huckleberry. Suppose it is an Indian dish?

This tiny berry requires time to find and gather. It is a sour fruit when eaten raw, with very little pulp inside the thick skin. Consequently, time seems to pass more slowly since you don't pick three and eat one as with other berries. It has been suggested that the deerberry has a taste of gooseberry-cranberry-grapefruit combination of sour, tart and bitter.

I personally find the fruit distinctive and unique. I, too, fail to appreciate the warm fruit, but when chilled and served cold it becomes passable. I prefer, however, the jelly.

The yellow-green jelly is made by boiling the fruit for about 10 minutes in just enough water to cover it. Pour off the liquid and measure. For each cup of juice, add equal amounts of sugar and 1 box Sure-Jell per four cups. Boil until the mixture slithers off the spoon. Remove from the heat, skim off the white foam on top and pour into your jelly jars. This is a real dinner party treat.

PERSIMMONS (*Diospyros virginiana*)

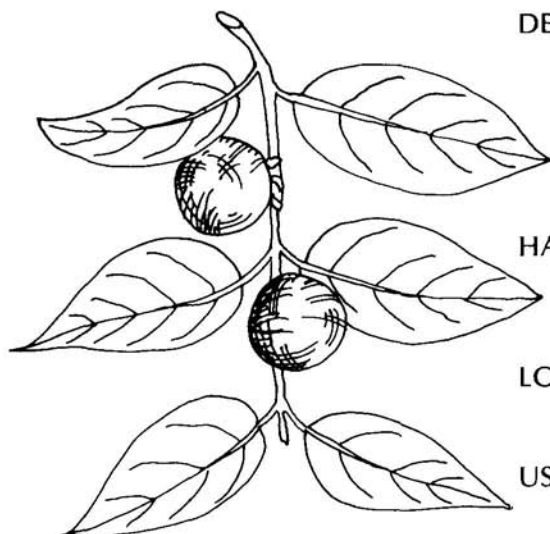
FLOWERS: May - June

DESCRIPTION: Alternate, oval leaves on short stalks. Top dark green, pale on bottom. Bark like alligator hide. Cream flowers, bell shape. Ebony Family.

HABITAT: Rocky or dry open woods, borders of woods, prairies, fallow and abandoned fields.

LOCATION: Scattered but not in far northern counties

USES: Fruit, breads, pies, candy, jelly, butter



A thoroughly ripe persimmon is very high on my favorite wild fruit list. While it has a taste unlike anything I can describe, it is a fruit fit for the gods!

Persimmon trees have a habit of multiplying rapidly and ultimately becoming a grove. While I'm all for more of these groves, trees and locations do vary considerably in the quality of fruit produced. I have a "favorite" tree that consistently produces large, sweet fruits.

I enjoy eating the fruits as I pick it, but it must be soft and mushy to be good. The green persimmons have the same effect as alum, making your mouth shrivel and pucker. The time of ripening is a variable. Sometimes the fruits are sweet with no hint of the bit-

ter quality long before the first frost, while others retain the bitterness even after frost and long into the fall.

To pick persimmons, I take my family along. My husband shakes the tree and the girls and I gather up the fallen orange goodies from the ground. Talk about manna from heaven!!!!

Persimmon pulp — raw fruit run through a colander — can be used in a variety of ways: cakes, breads, cookies, puddings, tortes and pies, to mention a few. A very good pie for Thanksgiving is to use your favorite pumpkin pie recipe and substitute persimmon pulp for the pumpkin. It is delicious and very similar to the pumpkin.

40 Another excellent use of this "sugar plum" is as a torte which is a recipe from Missouri College of Agriculture. Mix 1 cup bread crumbs, 1 t baking powder, 1 t salt, 1½ cups persimmon pulp and ½ cup nuts. Beat 2 egg yolks with ½ cup sugar. Add 4 egg whites which have been beaten stiff. Fold in a teaspoon of vanilla and pour into a greased shallow pan. Bake 30 minutes in a 325-degree oven. This may be served hot or cold.

Euell Gibbons' recipe is outstanding for Persimmon Nut Bread. Sift together 2 cups flour, 1 t soda. Cream 1 cup sugar, 1½ sticks oleo and mix in 2 well-beaten eggs. Add the creamed mixture to the dry ingredients, add 1 cup persimmon pulp, ½ cup of nuts and bake in 2 small loaf pans for an hour at 325 degrees. Heavenly!!!

I often freeze the pulp for later use. A unique way to use the pulp, however, is to spread it out very thinly on a cookie sheet and dry it in a 250-degree open-door oven for an hour or slightly longer. The leather, as it is called, must be allowed to dry completely. I learned from experience that it molds when stored in a sealed jar prior to being completely dried. It may then be cut into small squares and used as a fruit "jerky" for backpack trips. This also becomes a delicious addition to cookies as a raisin substitute or to candy as a date substitute. A favorite at Christmas time is Persimmon-Nut Candy Log. Boil 2 cups of sugar, 1 cup evaporated milk and a dab of butter to form a soft ball. Add 1 cup Persimmon Leather. Boil to hardball stage, remove from heat, cool, add 1 cup hickory nuts or black walnuts and 1 t vanilla. Beat and roll in waxed paper. Cut off slices as desired.

A good Persimmon Butter is made by using the recipe which follows: Combine 2½ cups persimmon pulp, 3 cups sugar, 1 t cinnamon, 2 small cinnamon sticks, ¼ t cloves, dash of allspice, juice of ½ lemon and ½ cup Rhine wine. Boil until thick.

While persimmon jelly is good, Persimmon Butter is so much better, I rarely make the jelly. The whole fruits may be preserved

by packing tightly in a fruit jar and surrounding each layer of persimmons with a layer of sugar until the jar is full. Seal this jar and save for special people. My first batch of persimmon preserves were a failure; they brandied! I did add a small amount of water to the layers of sugar. They were delicious on ice cream, but the gnats were so bad around the jar that they were saved only by placing in the refrigerator. Would that more of my failures were like that!!

The green leaves gathered through mid-summer make a passable tea, while the dried leaves make an even better one. Both fresh and dried, the tea is an excellent source of vitamin C. Another beverage obtained from this plant is a coffee-substitute made from the seeds. Roast the seeds for 4 hours in a low oven, 225 degrees, or overnight at 200 degrees. Grind the seeds for caffeine-free coffee which I find quite good.

Because I love the persimmon bread and torte too well, I need to freeze lots of pulp. Consequently, you can bet that this fall I'll be competing with the opossums and raccoons!!!

